

Community, Sustainability and Participation: form–function dilemmas in Tasmanian state-local partnerships



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The Tasmanian state–local partnership agreements program, instituted in 1998 by the late Premier Jim Bacon, is proving an innovation in the reorientation of inter-governmental affairs. The partnerships established thus far have totally transformed state–local relations. Indeed the program has been so successfully implemented that it is now impossible to imagine local governance in the state functioning without it. However this paper is concerned with partnerships in broader than functional terms. It is concerned with formative concepts, such as strengthened community, local sustainability and enhanced democracy, and whether these are being advanced by the partnership experience. It is not hard to judge the partnership program an innovation in the administrative and functional sense, for embedding the systematic networking of institutional relations for example. However this paper argues for evaluation against more complex criteria. The failed emphasis upon participatory governance in particular shows that the Tasmanian program cannot be judged a success against the partnership notion when it is more broadly defined. The paper identifies and interrogates a form–function dilemma in the partnership experience and provides a discursive account of, and reflection upon, the Tasmanian context. It finds that thus far the emphasis has been upon improved process design rather than upon exploiting the partnership program as a means of promoting more ‘formative’ aspirations.

The Tasmanian state–local partnership program was a product of the need to better manage state–local relations in the context of attempting to reduce the number of local councils. It was born of the attempt to resolve the impasse that the State Liberal minority government, supported in office by the Tasmanian Greens, had reached in proposing to amalgamate 29 local councils to half that number. The parochial public and political backlash to amalgamation was immense, sustained and powerful, with the proposal ultimately thwarted by a successful challenge in the Supreme Court (Haward and Zwart 1999). The Labor Party needed to have an alternative to forced amalgamations going into the 1998 state election campaign after the Liberal Government fell in contentious circumstances, including its attempts to reform local government and to sell off the State's hydro-electricity assets. Labor was elected in 1998 partly on the basis that no forced amalgamations would take place, but that a partnership approach would instead underpin improved efficiencies and improved relations between levels of government. Rather than forcing amalgamations then, the Labor government, led by the late Premier Jim Bacon, embarked upon a lengthy and ambitious process of establishing an entirely new partnership program. This program now facilitates innovative and revitalised state–local institutional relations, featuring joined up rather than amalgamated local government (Downe and Martin 2006), that have not been replicated anywhere else in Australia.

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As well as the concern with streamlining the operation of so many councils for such a small state, there were also concerns about local decline, long term sustainability, limited resources, and possible ways forward. Whilst it is following the global trend of concern for local revival (see Mazmanian and Kraft 1999; Taylor 2003), the Tasmanian program is nevertheless distinct for effectively being an institutional arrangement of the State between its sub-national and local levels. Local revival, indeed survival, is therefore a matter for formal rather than informal or community based structures. And since its establishment a decade ago, the program has evolved to embrace broader definitions of partnerships with the accommodation of regional and state based issues, as we shall see. With many of the councils in the process of renegotiating their initial partnerships, which expire after a three year period, it is now timely to cast a critical eye over this experience. In this paper I argue that the program is serving its function as a tool for clarifying and improving inter-governmental relations to an outstanding degree, but that the progress of its formative role in advancing social, economic and environmental priorities (Considine 2005: 11) is less convincing. Greater potential impact for the program remains, it is suggested, in the domains of community strengthening and local sustainability, with enhanced, indeed thus far unrealised, public participation as critical to achieving more complex goals.

The paper makes further observations about the partnership program in terms of network governance, at least in the institutional sense. The program certainly represents an institutional innovation in network governance terms by joining up state and local government in a way that has fostered collaborative advantage for both. It has also achieved the network governance aim of creating new opportunities for decision-making and local institution building, and in this sense has fostered a new interdependence and set of working relations between public actors (Edgar 2002). And the achievements of the program do echo those intended by network governance. The program promotes flexibility to local conditions, reduces costs by fostering local-to-local resource sharing, and overcomes fragmented arrangements for service delivery (Considine 2005: 13). What the program has not achieved so far, however, is the network governance aim of increased legitimacy through increased public participation in decision-making. The program is functioning well, then, but in the sense of servicing and enhancing inter-governmental relations rather than of promoting more general participatory governance. The program does directly influence both local politics and collaborative policy outcomes, but to this point without promoting the 'deepening democratic engagement' that is often seen as a core principle of network governance efforts.

The paper reviews international literature to firstly identify what it terms the 'form-function dilemma' in the partnership experience, or the tension between the formative aspirations that motivate partnerships, and the functional operations by which they are pursued. Whilst the Tasmanian experience is essentially a functional arrangement between levels of government, the paper identifies what it argues are unrealised aspirations that resonate more broadly and that are underpinned by public participation and power sharing in the partnership experience. Democracy is identified as a key formative aspiration of the partnership endeavour, which is readily constrained, as the international literature shows, by too great an efficiency emphasis. The network governance literature also captures the form-function dilemma, with efforts to promote community development in constant tension with efforts to inspire lasting institutional design and change. This dilemma is examined in Tasmania following a descriptive accounting of its state-local partnership program, which captures the embedding and implementation of its institutional design. This is the first paper to document the Tasmanian program, and it is limited by its descriptive focus, which is critical, however,

to its identification of form–function tensions, the criteria for which are drawn from policy literature that has burgeoned over the last two decades.

The Form–Function Dilemma

The term ‘partnership’ has been used for many years in numerous contexts. It has both positive and negative connotations, and ranges broadly in scope and type, with two or more partners generally working towards mutually agreed goals in an interdependent manner. Some see partnerships as public policy cure–alls, whilst others see them as over used, ambiguous and politicised - posing messy solutions to very messy problems (Cook 2000; Geddes 2006; Hastings 1996; Lowndes et al 1997). They belong to the practice of new governance whereby political influence has proliferated and administrative partners have multiplied way beyond the formal circle of traditional government (Bingham and Nabatchi 2005; Crowley and Coffey 2007). Partnerships vary in type from *public–private* to *inter–governmental* and *collaborative*, and are not static experiences or practices, but may evolve or vary from issue specific, ad hoc responses, to more general attempts at problem solving (Kernaghan 1993). However, key partnership features include: power; participation; formality; flexibility; collaboration and cooperation; self-reliance; synergy; goals; strategies and local transformation. Kernaghan argues that a true partnership will be recognisable for always promoting empowerment by sharing decision making. The term is used here in his sense of ‘a formal agreement to share power with others in the pursuit of joint goals and/or mutual benefits’ (Kernaghan 1993: 57–61; see also Davies 2002: 191).

In terms of this paper, the focus is on inter-governmental partnerships, and the potential for enhanced public participation and power sharing to underpin strategic state-local planning for social, economic and environmental outcomes. The dilemma raised is between the formative and functional roles of inter-governmental partnerships, with the argument being made that public participation is a key to both community strengthening and local sustainability. Considine (2004) describes the key dimensions of community strengthening as increased connectedness and shared leadership, with new governance institutions as facilitative bodies and partnerships that are truly inclusive. Prugh et al also stress inclusivity, by arguing that an engaged citizenry will correlate strongly with effective government responses to issues of sustainability. Indeed the environmental partnership experience offers a wealth of experience in collaborative planning that can be seen as both empowering of communities, and inspiring of transformative change (Prugh et al 2000: 129). Whilst these and other partnerships have their problems, it is rare that their critics recommend curtailed public participation as the remedy; indeed Radin (1996) recommends the opposite.

Table 1: Intergovernmental partnerships, community strengthening and local sustainability — Key Features

Intergovernmental Partnership	Community Strengthening	Local Sustainability
rejection of one size fits all	increased connectedness	engaged citizenry
multiple policy partners	shared leadership	collaborative planning
collaboration between partners	new governance institutions	science and culture interaction
<i>broad based participation</i> (Radin 1996)	<i>partnerships that are inclusive</i> (Considine 2004)	<i>community empowerment</i> (Prugh et al 2000).

Kernaghan (1993: 57) prefers to see the formative and functional roles of partnerships not as competing notions, but as features that constitute the dual purpose of the partnership experience. *Democracy* in his terms is then a formative aspect of partnerships (i.e., empowering individuals, groups and organisations outside government by enabling them to make a genuine contribution to government decisions that affect them). And *efficiency* is a functional aspect (i.e., improving the effectiveness and the responsiveness of public organisations). Nevertheless, he concedes that these two roles can and have generated tension at the local level. Hendriks and Tops (1999) illustrate this with their findings that local government reform has inspired contradictory trends in two countries — towards democracy in the Netherlands, but towards efficiency in Germany. They explain that, whilst the Netherlands discovered new public management as a reform tool relatively early, by the 1990s it was moving back away from efficiency rationales towards the rationale of the citizen. The opposite has been true in Germany, where the much later adoption of new public management as a reform tool has recast the citizen at the local level from collaborator to consumer. Hendriks and Tops argue that, because the Netherlands experienced and responded to its financial crisis earlier than Germany, it was then better placed to democratise local decision making at a time of decreased pressure for efficiency (Hendriks and Tops 1999: 146).

If we look to the United States, we can see that the partnerships that occurred in the 1980s were primarily driven by the 'Reaganomics' paradigm of economic scarcity and government desire to find more efficient and effective ways of using resources. Partnerships with business, community organisations and between levels of government were, and often still are, merely intended to avoid duplication of effort, and to share resources¹ (see also Mowbray 2005). These are much like service agreements. However, they may be intended, as the Oregon Option (SOO 2002) has been, to also foster more state or local fiscal autonomy, albeit in the context of the federal-state-local governments working together to test service delivery based upon measureable results. The Oregon Option, which was established at Oregon's initiative, may well have been inspired by the public-private partnerships for urban renewal that followed the partnership based decentralisation and deregulation of the Reagan administration. Closer to the Tasmanian experience are the US National Rural Development Partnerships that evolved from these earlier efforts and that reject a 'one-size-fits-all' approach to economic development, and seek local solutions instead facilitated by inter-governmental cooperation. Distinguishing features of the Rural Development partnership include collaboration, broad based participation, iteration and reliance upon multiple policy partners for policy development and implementation (Radin 1996; Table 1).

The UK Local Strategic Partnerships (LSP) bring together public, private, community and voluntary sector organisations, with the intention of securing synergistic working relationships on 'wicked issues' such as health, education, community safety and so on. They may or may not be initiated by local authorities, and were preceded by periods of local authority-led renewal, and public-private renewal. In general terms, LSPs aim to improve the quality of life, by working collaboratively, sustaining growth and improving service delivery (Lowndes et al 1997; Smith and Beazley 2000). These sorts of local partnerships reflect social and economic, if not always environmental, concerns, and have inspired community

¹ Intergovernmental Performance partnerships with States-Localities, *Strengthening the Partnership in Intergovernmental Service Delivery*, www.interesting-people.org/archives/interesting-people/199402/msg00174.html

trust, participation and gains, to varying degrees, in practice (Geddes 2006). They have become so prevalent that they have long been recognised by the OECD as being at the core of a new localism in regional communities that have been devastated by long term unemployment and general decline (Sabel 1996; DoE 1996). Partnership in this sense encourages social innovation as well as the allocation of scarce fiscal resources, and uses flexibility, synergy and participation as community revival and survival tools. The LSP process and experience is theoretically about localisation and shared responsibility, and is an acknowledged — if fraught and contested — means of enhancing the legitimacy of local governance in practice (Geddes 2006; Mullally 1998). In the case of LSPs, Geddes observes that despite their renewal and efficiency emphasis, and their facilitation of enhanced community participation, there have been few measurable policy outcomes that have demonstrated the value of partnership working over the ten years of the program (Geddes 2006).

The findings of Hendriks and Tops suggest in particular, that form may well follow function in local partnerships. In other words, having first achieved local government efficiencies, local partnerships may then be better placed to pursue enhanced local democratic opportunities. This is seemingly borne out by the experience in the United States at least, where partnerships concerned initially with fiscal efficiency and policy performance or results-based governance, have then been followed by partnerships concerned with collaborative efforts to achieve local participation and local priorities. In the UK, however, experience suggests that partnerships may simply proliferate broadly, as they have for example in Scotland (McArthur 1995), as well as evolve in type from public-private to local community arrangements rather than pursue any rational form to function pathway. Power sharing and devolution in these latter arrangements have also proven to be no guarantee of success in either community regeneration or local sustainability. Nevin and Shiner (1995: 313) also suggest that form follows function by observing that local empowerment fails where it has not been developed in the enabling context of a strong, principled state and a relevant planning framework. This sort of enabling framework may be exactly what an effective, institutionally embedded inter-governmental arrangement such as the Tasmanian partnership program may provide as a first step to then promoting broader goals and benefits.

The form-function partnership tension is certainly recognisable in the network governance literature, in terms of the efforts it captures to promote community development on one hand and to inspire institutional design on the other. There is in Tasmania a direct link — identified as desirable by theorists — between efforts to generate improvements in local economic development and the new forms of governance that have emerged in order to support it (Considine 2005: 16). The key to generating capacity to govern locally, in the absence of local government amalgamations as a type of enforced resource sharing, has been the evolution of the partnership program and the networking and regional planning it has inspired. The functional aspects of network governance are certainly highly recognisable in the Tasmanian program. Tasmanian partnerships are innovative institutional arrangements; have joined up and created new interdependencies between levels of government; and have tackled problems in a multi-dimensional and locally flexible way (Considine 2005:3). The parties to the partnerships are indeed locked into joint mandates and resource dependencies that function as governance 'service networks' where the state delivers to the client or customer in this case the local or regional community (Considine 2005: 6; 9). However, the Tasmanian partnerships also demonstrate how well, or to borrow Kernaghan's term, how 'efficiently' such governance arrangements can function in the absence of any great concern for democracy.

Tasmanian State-Local Partnerships

Despite having none but delegated legislative and fiscal authority, local government in Australia has increasingly seen itself less as a creature of the state and more as a partner in the act of governance (Chapman 1997). Historically, the notion of local governments as partners has referred to the Commonwealth's attempts to by-pass the States in implementing policy (Chapman 1997: 3). In Tasmania today however, the notion of 'local partnership' is much changed and refers to state initiated agreements with local governments on policy priorities and local development in a strategic, state planning context. This arrangement is closer to the rural partnerships in the United States than the local partnerships in the United Kingdom. However, all these partnerships, Tasmania's included, are concerned with local resilience and renewal. Tasmania has been at the forefront of the Australian States in terms of negotiating state-local partnership agreements with its 29 local councils. Whilst New South Wales has expressed interest in Tasmania's program and Victoria has established issue specific partnerships, South Australia appears most likely to follow Tasmania's lead at this stage (Meiklejohn and Barnard 2004: 38-9).²

The Tasmanian program was an initiative of the late Tasmanian Premier, Jim Bacon, who was also Minister for Local Government. It had its genesis in the view that committed, progressive, local communities and sound local economies are fundamental to the social and economic development of the State. Establishing strong links to community priorities was considered an essential aim (Stevens 2000:1). For the Premier, the partnership program was about formalising the relationship between the two levels of government, putting these relations on a positive basis, and establishing formal processes to work through state-local government issues (Hansard, Tuesday 19th October, 1999). It was also intended to reverse the trend throughout Australia of stripping local communities of their input into decision making (Hansard, Tuesday 13th April, 1999) and to find local solutions to local problems. The program is intended to serve several purposes. It strives for genuine cooperative working relationships, improved efficiency, mutually determined funding allocation and enhanced local service delivery. The aim is to generate new opportunities for local growth and development within the context of Tasmania Together, the State's community generated a 20-year social, environmental and economic plan (CLG 2000).

Premier Bacon conceived of the idea for the partnership program from a Nixon Report recommendation that service arrangements needed to be agreed at least between the two island councils and the state government (Nixon 1997: 71). The Premier described the fact that this logic could apply to the whole State as an alternative to amalgamations as 'irresistible' (Hansard, Wednesday 17th March 1999). Also attributable to 'irresistible logic' was the need to integrate the program with a new state planning agenda, also introduced by Labor, with partnership agreements then integral to implementing the benchmarks set by this process. Because financial aspects attach to partnership agreements, the then Tasmanian Treasurer David Crean declared the partnership program 'a cornerstone of Tasmania's Industry Development Plan' [Wed 6 June 2001 Estimates Committee A (Crean) Part 3].³ The partnership program is thus not only an attempt by an incoming state government to move beyond a period of poor inter-governmental relations, but also an act

² Forced amalgamations, the alternative to partnerships that was being considered initially in Tasmania, are being planned for in Queensland driven by efficiency concerns. Dollery (2007), however, argues that there are no grounds for suggesting that bigger councils are any more financially sustainable over time than smaller ones.

³ Partnership agreements do not create new funds. They are negotiated within the framework of existing budgets.

of *integrated governance* that has contributed to the development of a strategic context for policy in Tasmania. State planning; partnerships with local councils and regional bodies; links to industry policy; and industry councils thus comprise a newly established meta-policy context for the state.

The partnership program was launched in 1998. The first agreement between the State and the north-west coast's Circular Head Council was signed in June 1999. There are currently 28 bilateral state-local agreements, three regional agreements covering the entire State and every council, and four state-wide issue based agreements. The state-wide agreements with all councils include the 'simplifying planning', 'waste management', 'financial reform' and 'communication and consultation' agreements, with an agreement also for the benefit of young Tasmanians. Also recently signed is a tripartite Partnership Agreement for Population and Ageing between commonwealth, state and local governments, the only one of its kind in the country. A partnership expires after three years and then lapses, so that currently, seventeen councils and three regions are negotiating second agreements. The partnership program also embraces two broader agreements on respectively the Derwent River's Estuary management, and sustainable tourism in Southern Tasmania. There are partnership agreements more generally, with the University of Tasmania; Volunteering Australia; the Tasmanian Chamber of Commerce and Industry; and a memorandum of understanding on employment with the Commonwealth. The Tasmania *Together* Progress Board — an independent statutory authority — has itself also struck partnership agreements with a broad range of government, non-government and community bodies on the implementation of its 20-year social, environmental and economic plan.

It is worth noting that the partnership program has been an institution building exercise, including the establishment of the Premier's Local Government Council that meets bi-annually. This is chaired by the Premier and comprises the nine elected representatives on the General Management Committee for the Local Government Association of Tasmania. The Council is supported by an official's committee, which is comprised of representatives from the State, local councils and the Local Government Association of Tasmania. Different negotiating teams are involved with each partnership agreement, led by a different state head of agency each time, and comprising only the numbers required to facilitate an agreement. There is a protocol arrangement to be followed in negotiating a partnership and in its implementation and reporting phases.⁴ The program is supported by the Local Government Office, which is located within the Department of Premier and Cabinet. It was initially strongly supported politically by Premier Bacon as Minister for Local Government⁵ and by a Parliamentary Secretary for Local Government. A critical feature of the program has been the linking-up of state and local officials during the partnership negotiation, implementation, monitoring and reporting stages. Over 600 officials are believed to be involved in well-established relations between the state and local spheres that were previously unknown. An electronic implementation data-base has also been established by the Local Government Division to facilitate reporting and evaluation of the program (LGD 2004). Partnership implementation schedules are managed through this.

⁴ Available at: <http://www.dpac.tas.gov.au/divisions/lgo/partnerships/publications.html>.

⁵ Altered by the current Premier Paul Lennon to Minister Assisting the Premier on Local Government.

The partnership program is a very new way for the State and local councils to work together for the benefit of local communities — at an earlier than normal stage of policy development and in a way that is not legislatively driven (Garcia 2000: 4). All agreements are voluntary and initiated when a council writes to the Premier with a view to begin negotiating. Council and Cabinet then sign each agreement, and each sets out negotiated actions and timeframes for social, environmental, economic outcomes, based upon a consistent *set of principles*. These comprise:

1. A reflection of the State's desire for improved cooperation between state and local government in Tasmania.
2. The State retaining responsibility for services that require uniform standards or consistency, and those relating to state-wide economic development and social issues.
3. Changes in responsibilities to achieve overall efficiency across both spheres of government.
4. Initiatives to see that Partnership Agreement results are measurable by performance indicators. Performance Agreements provide for the development and implementation of performance indicators, particularly in relation to financial management and service delivery, and to monitor any anticipated partnership benefits.⁶
5. Provision of an annual report to State Parliament on the progress of the implementation of agreements, and notification of the achievements of outcomes in key areas such as economic development, tourism, recreation and so forth (LGO 2006).

The Tasmanian partnership program does represent an entirely new, collaborative approach to inter-governmental relations, with greater community renewal and sustainability potential than perhaps it aspires to or is credited for. Clearly the program has brought local government into play as a key strategic governance partner. Local councils and their officials have certainly gained bargaining power and an institutionalised forum for direct negotiation with the State on community affairs, but the input of the community is less assured. Partnerships are expected to reflect the strategic plans of local councils and these are assumed to have had public input, although this is most often at best by way of submissions on draft plans. Nevertheless government rhetoric is strongly supportive of the partnerships as vehicles for community views and priorities, with a critical feature of the program being that the Premier's Local Government Council may itself seek local input. The program does involve power sharing between levels of government, bone fide participation by councils in setting their own agendas and both a formality and flexibility in negotiating arrangements. It is thus far less obvious that the effect of the program is increased community self-reliance achieved through a creative harnessing of collaborative efforts for local transformation. This raises the issue, however, of how the program is to achieve its social, economic and environmental goals over the long term without explicitly designing these goals into both the program and its evaluation processes.

⁶ Available at: http://www.dpac.tas.gov.au/divisions/lgo/partnerships/processdocs/PA_Process_Flowchart_Sep07.pdf.

Evaluating Partnership Practice

The evaluation of the Tasmanian partnership program is a very simple task in the sense of evaluating how it is functioning, but a very complex one, in the sense of evaluating what it is achieving for local communities in terms of social, economic and environmental their goals. If we firstly consider the functional context, we see that the Tasmanian partnerships are true inter-governmental partnerships in Armstrong and Lenihan's (1999) sense of being agreements that are collaboratively designed and delivered, with shared decision making, risk and gains. In terms of network governance they create new pathways between public actors for collaborative decision making on community development and service delivery for example (Considine 2005). They are also pragmatic arrangements that reject the one size fits all approach to state-local affairs, as do the US National Rural Development and the UK Local Strategic Partnerships. Every partnership follows an agreed process with different outcomes, and indeed different types of partnerships have evolved to meet different 'connected' needs between councils, in regions and across the state. These are robust arrangements in Considine's (2004) sense of what is required to establish governance arrangements for state-local collaboration. In fact they are flexible for creating opportunities for aspects of each of the three 'decentralised', 'joint' or 'devolved' local governance styles. But the Tasmanian program does not provide for institutionalised citizen participation, nor for the explicit inclusion of non-government stakeholders. This participation may eventually occur, however, first, because it has a pattern of occurring elsewhere and second, because there is a strong platform for such a move, and lastly because such participation was always intended.⁷

The lack of institutionalised citizen participation does not mean that the partnership program lacks accountability in other more functional ways however. Indeed, with the exception of the manner in which negotiation is struck, the process is open and transparent, well supported by web based resources, material, reports and agreement details that are open to the public. Again in terms of the program's functional context, annual reporting of partnership progress is both comprehensively done to State Parliament and specifically recorded by local councils for constituencies in their own annual reports. These are compiled in part from tri-annual reports to the Premier, Cabinet, State Parliament, mayors, local councils and regional bodies. Tracking of progress on the agreements is achieved via an implementation matrix that notes agreed actions, lead and other agencies, action officers, milestones, progress to milestones and links to the benchmarks in the Tasmanian *Together* plan. Evaluation takes place one year after signing and at the expiry of a partnership. It is possible by looking at it's annual report to State Parliament to see what each partnership has achieved for the year with respect to the detail of projects, and in terms of a relatively simplified statistical analysis. For example, the progress summary of key outputs in 2006 showed for each Council: i) progress within and outside of agreed timeframes; ii) progress on hold; and iii) recommendations to discontinue progress. There is no longer an aggregated figure for each of these types for the entire program, but only figures for each agreement.

Whilst the progress summary of key outputs is a logical reporting measure for the functional operation of the Tasmanian partnerships, it is not complemented by any broader evaluative tools that attempt to measure progress type, for example, social, economic or environmental

⁷ The partnerships are intended to "provide the state government (sic.) with a structured way of talking to local government. They also reflect the increasing complexity of local government as it expands its responsibilities towards the broader social mix of community democracy" (Scott 2002: 2).

impact. Neither is there a reporting linkage to existing state-wide tools used to determine these impacts, i.e., the Tasmania *Together* benchmarking and the *Measuring Council Performance* processes. Furthermore, there are no differentiated evaluative techniques specific to each different type of partnership, nor any focus upon outcomes other than implementation timelines. There is in effect an 'instrumental-managerial' (Sanderson 2001) focus on performance management to the detriment of the development of other evaluative styles. This focus on 'process outcomes' is at the expense of focus on 'progress outcomes' and has typified reporting on the UK's LSP program (Geddes 2006: 13). All that can be gleaned from the Tasmanian reporting is a scorecard on the number of partnership initiatives that have been completed or not, that have progressed in a timely fashion or not, and that have been extended or discontinued. The opportunity is lost then to pursue formative aspirations (i.e., those beyond the functional) of the partnership program through purpose designed evaluation and evaluative techniques. Whilst an assessment of process outcomes shows that the Tasmanian program is well embedded and operational, an assessment of progress outcome points to the limitations of failing to extensively involve local communities.

It could be argued the Tasmanian program does not need extensive community involvement to identify social, economic and environmental goals since it is linked to the Tasmania *Together* plan which was itself derived from extensive community consultation (Crowley and Coffey 2007). And indeed, it is a part of the formal sign-off procedures, if not the public reporting procedures, for the parties to relate partnership goals to the community priorities identified in the plan. However, Tasmania *Together* goals and benchmarks are necessarily generic, and they do require local interpretation by local communities and benchmarking by local authorities, something that should logically become part of the partnership process. These local communities are also currently assumed by the partnership process to have driven local council agendas and plans to an unrealistic degree, and it may be that an amendment of local government legislation could mandate bone fide deliberative and consultative processes. As the literature above suggests, the lack of community participation is seriously deficient. Broad-based participation, inclusiveness and community empowerment are key defining features of the objectives of intergovernmental partnerships, community strengthening and local sustainability as we have seen (as in Table 1). Tasmania does have an advantage if it does decide to pursue enhanced participation at the local level, however, for at least having in place an enabling policy context with its existing, well functioning partnership program.

There are at least two ways in which broad-based community participation could to be introduced into the Tasmanian partnerships process. First, through the local council strategic planning process, and second, by amending partnership protocol to require public input. In terms of the planning process, explicit clauses requiring public participation could be strengthened in the *Local Government Act*, covering the public's role in local planning, local partnerships and perhaps even issue specific local and regional deliberative forums. Local councils could borrow from the extensive public consultative techniques employed in the development of the Tasmania *Together* plan which were inspired in part by the Glenorchy City Council's community consultation techniques. Similarly, partnership protocol could require that community forums be run from an early stage in the process to help determine what is put on the table. Community negotiators could also work in issue groups along side local government, business and state government negotiators. Public participation could be required before any partnership agreement was signed, and a reporting of its perceived results could be required before any was renegotiated. Issue-based evaluation could also

drive enhanced participation, by surveying the contents of partnership schedules to see which actions were promoting community, sustainability or a more participatory community. The picture that would begin to emerge from this kind of broader evaluation would be one that shows how formative aspirations are tracking at the local level, to complement the accountability based evaluation of the functional effectiveness of programs.

This paper has argued that there is a form–function dilemma or tension in the partnership experience between broad ‘formative’ aspirations, such as community empowerment, revival and survival, and more narrow functional considerations, such as efficiency and resource sharing. Much of the international literature illustrates the disconnect between formative partnership aspirations and outcomes such as improved citizen engagement, quality of life, and environmental sustainability. Neville and Shiner (1995) argue that the haphazard forming of partnerships contributes to this disconnect and that the embedding of effective partnership practice is better facilitated by systematic, deliberate state effort. The Tasmanian partnership experience shows, however, that there is a risk that the creation of direct and efficient pathways between state and local government actors may offer no incentives for involving the community. In this case, innovative institutional design which is the product of systematic, deliberate state efforts may in fact introduce new rigidities rather than ending old rigidities, as we would expect say from introducing networked governance (Considine 2005). On the other hand, this may simply show that the Tasmanian program can only be defined as network governance in its most narrow, limited, sense of intergovernmental service agreements. It is worth reflecting on network governance theory, and the Tasmanian partnership practice, therefore, before considering remedies to the program's democratic deficits in this paper's conclusions.

Conclusions

If we return to Kernaghan's analytic lenses of efficiency and democracy, we can see that efficiency reflects the functional aspects of partnership arrangements, and democracy, the more formative, or aspirational rather than directional aspects. There is a strong correlation between the emphasis in network governance literature on issues of mechanics — the functional processes of joining up, interacting, collaborating and working in multiple dimensions — and the Tasmanian experience. Just as the network governance literature suggests, the Tasmanian experience has been one of the new forms of decision making, in the sense of new place–based institution building, focusing on local problem solving, and partnering to create robust networks. The partnership experience has been one of linking small, parochial local councils that have found their capacity to govern increasingly shrinking, with other councils, regional bodies, issue arenas, the state government and its officials. The partnership program resonates therefore with the functional aspects of network governance, particularly in the sense of more effective and better negotiated service delivery. It resonates less so with network governance more broadly defined and falls well short of Considine's ‘authentic, interactive localism’, with enhanced opportunity for citizen involvement in decision making a notable road not taken. Neither is the Tasmanian experience network governance that is driven by its own dynamics, rather it is the creature of state control, with asymmetrical power relations a key defining feature.

So in conclusion, it is clear that the Tasmanian partnership program is functioning efficiently, but that its capacity could be expanded through more explicit community strengthening and sustainability planning — facilitated by more consultative and deliberative practices. The

partnership program would then be better placed to achieve its objectives of progressing agreed social, economic and environmental priorities. The program is a highly functional, efficient mechanism for managing state-local relations, and for negotiating joint goals, resources, and strategic priorities. It is also iterative — evolving with the emergence of issue based state-wide and tri-partite partnerships that have become very effective governance tools. However, the program is arguably narrowly conceived despite its underpinning by social, economic and environmental rhetoric, and is further narrowly evaluated in terms of agreed schedules, and lists of agreed measures, discontinued measures and future measures. With the process now so administratively embedded, both narrow conception and narrow evaluation could be reconsidered. Having first achieved local government efficiencies, local partnerships are now well placed to pursue enhanced local democratic opportunities. In effect, the original conception of service agreements with island councils is now simply writ large and the State is yet to lift its aspirations, to achieve truly participatory governance, reach for sustainability, and achieve long term local revival.

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